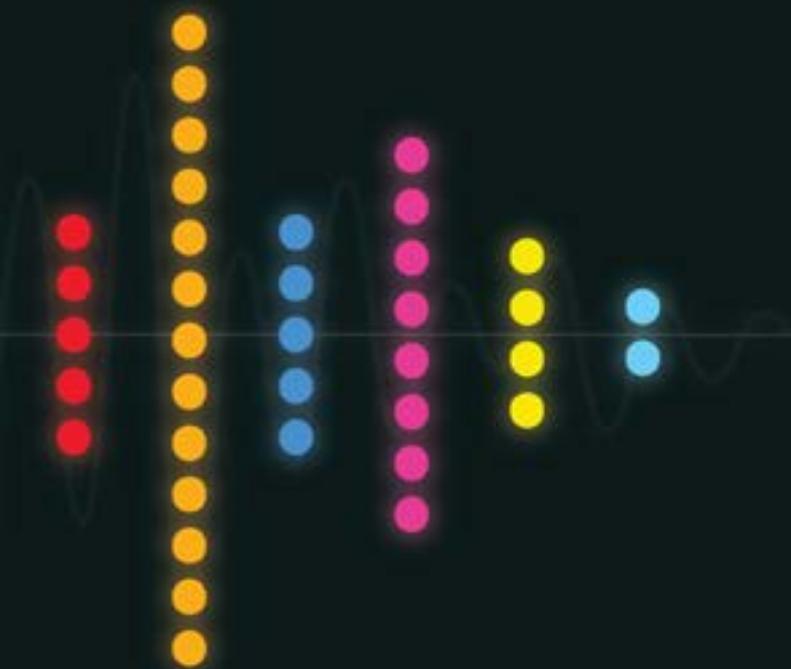


LISTEN



WMBC is setting out on a **ten year journey** of **50k stories** of **God's love** through the movement of his church! We want people to see the church in a **new light** so that they discover Jesus, and the first step in that journey is training ourselves to

**LISTEN
WELL**

We will never be able to change our neighbours and culture's negative stereotypes or perceptions of the church if we don't take the time to listen to what they are.

We live in an age where the church has to earn the right to be heard, and we know of no better way to do that than to listen first. What if, instead of coming to church to be preached to, people came to church to be heard? And I think we can all attest from personal experience that listening "speaks" in ways far more powerfully than talking ever could.

This resource guide is a companion for our fall teaching series on listening and we encourage you to begin the journey with us as we learn to love others through unhurried listening. If you are unsure what to do and who to help, listen to the person nearest you, and prepare to be changed by what you hear.

- **Terry Dueck** (*Lead Pastor*)



LISTEN
TO
GOD

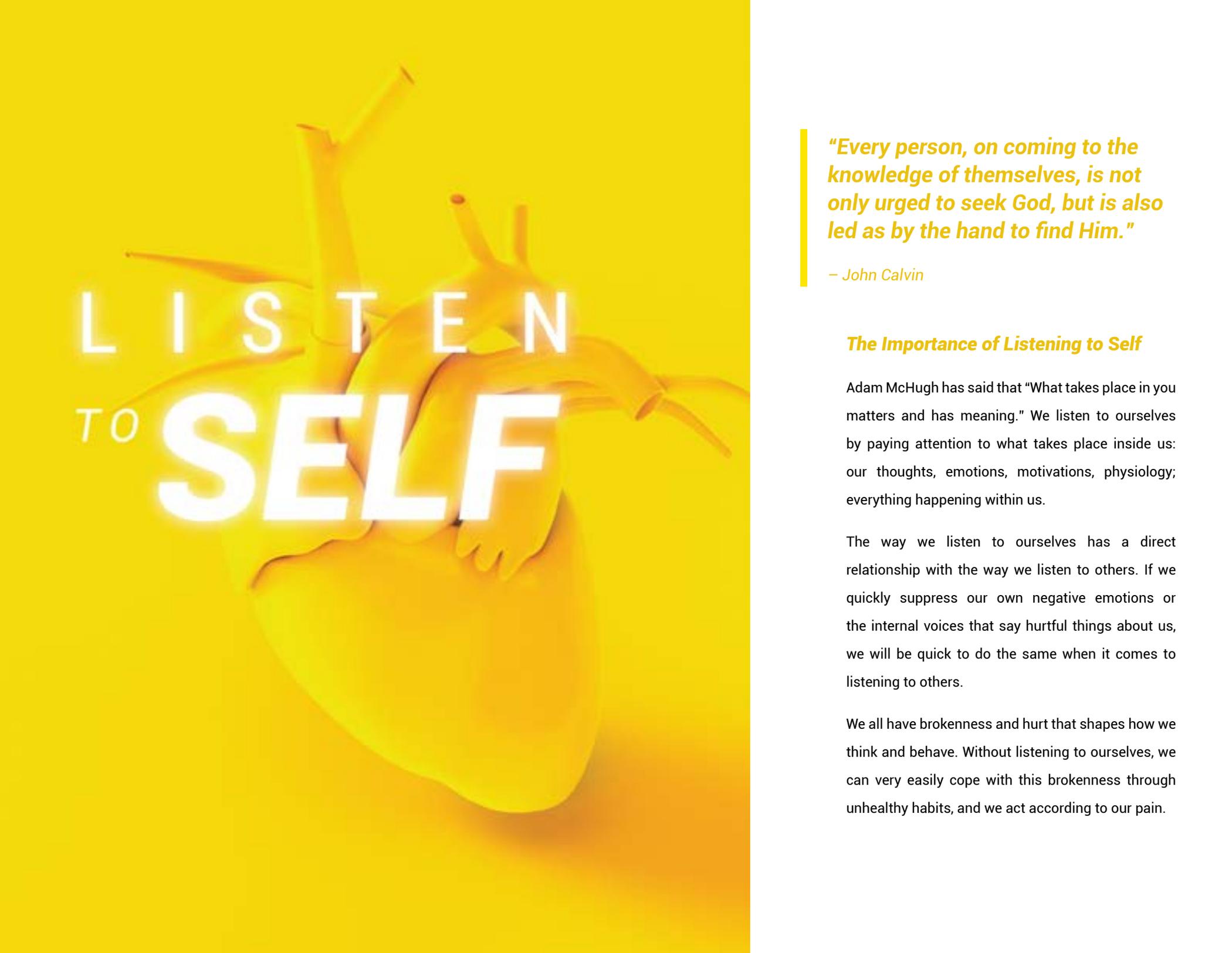
“Listen to the voice who calls you beloved, because otherwise you will run around begging for affirmation, for praise, and for success.”

- Henri Nouwen

The Importance of Listening to God

God speaks. He speaks in many different ways, with different tones and messages. On Mt. Sinai, God spoke to Israel with smoke, thunder, and fire. Later, on the same mountain, a huddled, broken Elijah heard God speak in a still, small voice. God is speaking all the time, with messages of comfort and conviction, of rest and rousing, of purpose and plan.

When we listen to God, we understand that He is the only one who can meet our deepest needs and desires. We understand His goodness, His heart, His love for us, and we accept that He approves of us without us having to earn it. Without truly listening to God, we look for these things from the people around us and we become a drain on them. We end up asking people to do what only God can do.

A human heart is the central focus, rendered in a light yellow color. Two hands are shown cupping the heart from the sides, also in a light yellow color. The background is a solid, bright yellow. The text "LISTEN TO SELF" is overlaid on the image in a white, sans-serif font. "LISTEN" is in all caps and spaced out across the top. "TO" is smaller and positioned to the left of "SELF". "SELF" is in all caps and is the largest word, positioned below "LISTEN".

LISTEN TO SELF

“Every person, on coming to the knowledge of themselves, is not only urged to seek God, but is also led as by the hand to find Him.”

– John Calvin

The Importance of Listening to Self

Adam McHugh has said that “What takes place in you matters and has meaning.” We listen to ourselves by paying attention to what takes place inside us: our thoughts, emotions, motivations, physiology; everything happening within us.

The way we listen to ourselves has a direct relationship with the way we listen to others. If we quickly suppress our own negative emotions or the internal voices that say hurtful things about us, we will be quick to do the same when it comes to listening to others.

We all have brokenness and hurt that shapes how we think and behave. Without listening to ourselves, we can very easily cope with this brokenness through unhealthy habits, and we act according to our pain.

A vintage rotary telephone is shown against a warm, orange-toned background. The words "LISTEN TO OTHERS" are written in large, white, sans-serif capital letters across the center of the phone's dial. The word "LISTEN" is on the top line, "TO" is on the second line, and "OTHERS" is on the third line, all centered horizontally.

LISTEN TO OTHERS

"O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love."

– Anonymous, in the tradition of St. Francis of Assisi

The Importance of Listening to Others

Loving someone can be described as caring enough about someone to care for their needs and work for their wellbeing, even at the expense of our own. Doing this requires listening: to hear what their needs are and understand how we can work towards their wellbeing. To love someone well, we need to listen to them. We need to hear their experiences, beliefs, thoughts, feelings, fears, and hopes. By doing this, we show them that they truly matter to us and to God.

A blue-tinted image of a hand grenade, rendered in a low-poly, geometric style. The grenade is positioned diagonally, with its pin and lever visible at the top. The text "LISTEN TO OTHERS IN PAIN" is overlaid on the image in a white, sans-serif font. "LISTEN" is at the top, "TO OTHERS" is in the middle, and "IN PAIN" is at the bottom. The word "OTHERS" is significantly larger and bolder than the other words.

LISTEN TO OTHERS IN PAIN

“Many people are looking for an ear that will listen. They do not find it among Christians, because these Christians are talking when they should be listening.”

– Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The Importance of Listening to Others in Pain

Jesus said that the world would know that we are His disciples by the way we love each other. It is in the midst of pain and suffering that this love for each other is tested most. In times of suffering, people need the presence and the listening of others the most. If we resort to speaking to others in pain instead of listening to them, we jump over a very important part of what Jesus taught us to do: suffer with those who suffer, especially those who suffer within the Church.

WHO'S IN YOUR 100?

We believe that our culture's view of the Church is keeping many people from encountering Jesus and the true identity, purpose, and life that God has for them. If we want to change this, we have to begin by changing our culture's view of the Church. We believe that the first step to this is listening to the world around us.

Each of us has a role to play in this. We are all connected to roughly 100 people: friends, family, co-workers, the student who serves us our coffee, the woman who lives in the house next door. Listening well to these people is the first step in showing them a different vision of the Church, and bringing them closer to their Creator.

So to kick things off, start making a list of the people you can be listening to.

Who's in your 100?

FAMILY

FRIENDS

COWORKERS

EXTENDED FAMILY

ACQUAINTANCES

OTHER

GOOD LISTENING PRACTICES

- 1. Take Time:** It's hard to listen to someone when you've got somewhere you need to go, or something else on your mind. Listening well involves giving the other person the gracious gift of taking the time to go at their pace.
- 2. Silence Your Inner Critic:** When someone talks, we can get into the habit of analyzing what they're saying or preparing our response. When we do that, we're really listening to ourselves, not to the other person. Quieting our internal critic lets us actually listen to what the other person is saying without judging them or putting them into a category.
- 3. Listening is Physical:** You listen with your whole body, not just your ears. Make eye contact with the person you're listening to and turn your body towards them. Nod your head when you understand, shake it when they share something hurtful. Set aside physical objects that could divide or divert your attention from the person in front of you.
- 4. Ask Open Questions:** Open questions require more of a response than just a "yes" or "no" answer. Instead of asking "did you have a good weekend?" ("yes" or "no"), ask "what did you do this weekend?" ("There was this huge bear . . ." or "I've never eaten so many pierogis!")
- 5. Give Up Control:** Sometimes the opinions, beliefs, or thoughts that someone shares go against our core values, or are somehow threatening to us. When this happens, it can be easy to stop listening and try to protect ourselves, or control the conversation. Giving up control allows the other person's words to actually impact us.
- 6. Empathize:** Try to put yourself into the other person's shoes, or feel the things they are feeling.
- 7. Let Them Know you Heard Them:** You can let someone know you heard them by paraphrasing what they said, clarifying that you heard them correctly, or by asking questions that engage what they've already said.

GETTING STARTED

While listening itself is a valuable act of love, we're also hoping that our listening will reveal how the people in our lives view the Church and how that affects their understanding of who God is. These are not conversations we stumble into, if we want to listen to these things, we'll have to ask good questions, and we'll have to be trustworthy and safe people to talk to. With that in mind, here are some ways that you can start talking about how people view the Church.

- 1. PROVIDE A PREFACE:** Let's face it, talking about religion or the Church is uncomfortable for most people, but having an understanding about why they're talking about it can be helpful. We recommend introducing your question to help them get a sense of why you're talking about it, and clears up any fears about an ulterior motive. Feel free to let them know that your church wants to know what people think about the Church in general, and that there's no pressure to say the right thing here, we know that we haven't been perfect, and we want to know what we need to work on.
- 2. THE QUESTION:** A great question to ask is "What has been your experience of the Church?" This encourages people to reflect on their own experiences with the Church, not just the popular cultural view of the Church.
- 3. THE FOLLOW-UP QUESTION:** Depending on how someone responds to your first question, you should have an idea of what their opinion is. If they say they haven't been to church ever, or for a while, your follow-up

question could be, "If I can ask, why is that?" If it's clear that they've been hurt by someone in the Church, you can offer an apology, and ask about their experience. If they're positive about the Church, ask what it is about the Church they appreciate.

- 4. EMPATHIZE:** Whatever their response, we can empathize: if they're positive about the Church, we can celebrate that with them. If they've been hurt by the Church, we can apologize and mourn with them. If they're negative about the Church, we can agree that the Church is imperfect and has a checkered past and present. In every case, empathizing helps show them that we have heard them, that we understand, and that we see what they see.

SMALL GROUPS

Starting in our Listen series, we're encouraging small groups to change their meeting format to create space to listen to each other. Below is a sample of what a listening-focused group night could look like:

Discussion - Talk about Sunday's teaching, using the previous section and your own notes as a guide. What stood out to you? What did you agree or disagree with? Was there anything that was new to you?

Listening - Start by praying for God to speak through His Spirit as you share and listen.

Have someone share something personal, something that's had a big impact on who they are or how they see the world: being bullied as a child, a parent's words of advice that guide their lives, something someone said that has changed the way they see themselves for good or bad. It would be a good idea to decide who is sharing the week before so that they have time to think about what they could share.

While they're sharing the rest of the group can practice good listening (see above).

Once they're finished, take time to ask questions, share what you heard from them. Also, keep in mind that God loves to speak through His people, and often has messages for us to give to others. Listen to what He might be saying during this process as well, and be ready to share that with others.

Prayer - After each person shares, pray for them based on what they shared and what you heard.

